

ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional) Presentation by Anatoliy Rybakov at AAASS Convention,
6 November 1987

FROM: <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> Director, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; display: inline-block;"></div>	EXTENSION 64741	NO. DATE 2 December 1987
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Several FBIS and DI analysts found the Soviet writer Rybakov's remarks at the AAASS very interesting. I think you will too.



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18 November 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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6 November 1987

1. On Friday, 6 November 1987, Anatoliy Rybakov, 76 year-old author of "Children of the Arbat" (Detyi Arbata), a recently-published Soviet novel dealing with Stalin and his repressions, spoke at the national convention of the AAASS on "Glasnost and Literature: A Personal View." Rybakov was a participant on the panel entitled "Soviet Literature in the Days of Glasnost," which came as a surprise to many, since he had not been announced on the preliminary program. His presentation and the question and answer session which followed proved to be quite interesting and lively, providing some insight on the writer's and historian's points of view on Stalin, glasnost and restructuring (perestroika). Included below is a summary of my notes on the presentation.

2. Speaking in Russian to a packed audience of American sovietologists and to a number of his Soviet colleagues who attended the conference, Rybakov described his childhood, his arrest on 5 November 1933, and his exile to North Siberia for a three-year period. Rybakov explained that it was this period which prompted him to write "Children of the Arbat," with its setting partly in the area of his exile. After Rybakov was released, he was not permitted to return to Moscow or to live in any large city of the Soviet Union. Despite training as an engineer, he became a driver/chauffeur and travelled throughout small towns, becoming an observer "of organs of government." When the war came, he enlisted and served in the Army at the front lines. In 1946, Rybakov returned to Moscow to live in a house on the Arbat (also the setting of a part of his novel), and using his experiences in prison, wrote his first story in 1948, at the age of 37. ("Suffering for an artist is very important. It makes him focus on events and observe them carefully.") With that story, Rybakov began to write biographical works and to formulate "Children of the Arbat". When Khrushchev came to power, Rybakov submitted the first part of his novel to Tvardovskiy, editor of NOVYY MIR, in 1976. Tvardovskiy liked the novel and announced its publication, but the novel did not appear in print. As Rybakov put it, Stalin and his cult of personality was at that time a "very delicate matter" and since two of Rybakov's chapters dealt with Stalin, the publication was squelched. Rybakov continued to write and completed the second part of the novel. "A character, you know, sometimes takes over and lives outside the author," explained Rybakov, "and Stalin took over so that the second part of my book ended up with 10 chapters on him. By the time I finished the third part, he had taken over half the novel."

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3. Discussing the reasons for the novel's publication in 1987, Rybakov said: "We are coming to the period of glasnost. In the 1930's our country saw great achievements, in which Stalin played a big role. However, these achievements were primarily administrative. NEP, Lenin's economic system for building up the agricultural sector, was replaced by administrative measures. This was also a time for the strengthening of Stalin's power, and millions of people died as a result of it. All this affected the moral fibre of our country, our people. Repressions, forcing people to silence, resulted in the loss of the humaneness of man. Since one [person] began to think for all, the rest stopped thinking. Since one began to decide for all, the rest stopped deciding, and since one began to take initiative for all, the rest lost initiative. An atmosphere of fear was born, and that became our inheritance. Now, at a time when we need to move forward, this moral-psychological attitude of fear and our loss of initiative holds us back. If we hope to move forward, each person needs to do his own thinking. Only then will we progress. We must change the moral-psychological attitudes of our people. In that lies the heart of perestroika. People need to be free, they need glasnost."

4. "Glasnost first began in culture and literature," he continued, "and it is beginning to take hold, but very slowly, in other areas as well, and will, indisputably, give results in the areas of economics and politics."

5. Rybakov claimed that Western intellectuals need glasnost in order to study it as a political phenomenon, as a dissertation topic. "For us, it is no dissertaton; it is a question of our lives, our country's future. We have no family that has not suffered as a result of the Stalin repressions. The figure of Stalin himself is not that important, and I'll leave it to the historians to decide what to do with him. The important thing, however, is what this man brought to our society, and this is what we need to free ourselves from. Stalin is one of the characters in my novel. I try to get through to his psyche, to his desire for power. I do this so that people who are still under his influence could understand this person for what he really was."

6. Rybakov then shortly summarized his novel, and classified the reactions to it, based on more than 700 letters he received, into three different areas: 1) the older generation which is still afraid and categorically denounces the novel -- according to Rybakov, roughly 10% of the letter-writers; 2) those who were repressed and their families, including children still searching for their parents ("many are children

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of former Politburo members"), making up roughly 20%; and 3) the largest group--young people aged 17-35, who "accept the drama of life that the novel illustrates and who look for the moral ideal and for truth, but don't always find it; these young readers are getting a 'breath' of truth and of morality. They accept the novel and support it."

7. Reading letters from each group, Rybakov expressed his surprise at the fact that so many Soviet youth are interested in the "history of our country's government" and pointed out that women in their 40's are the most negative and critical of his novel. The novel is complete, he concluded, and explained that he is writing a second one to appear in DRUZHBA NARODOV concerning the years 1935-39 ("35 and Other Years"), and a third novel which will cover the historic events through 1944. Both will include Stalin and Sasha Pankratov as major characters.

8. Following Rybakov's presentation, well-known Yugoslav writer and critic Mihailo Mihailov presented several short remarks on the novel, pointing out that Gorbachev's recent October Revolution speech sounds much like the novel. Both symbolize perestroika and are an example of glasnost. Mihailov also noted that the last three important Party Congresses were a setting for three major literary works: the 20th saw Dudintsev's "Not By Bread Alone", the 22nd--"One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich", and the 27th--"Children of the Arbat." He also noted that Lenin started the system which began to change the moral-psychological attitudes of Soviet society, while Stalin exploited it. Rybakov's novel is invaluable, according to Mikhalov, because "on its pages we see a study of the beginnings and the future of Gorbachev's perestroika."

9. During a lively question and answer period, Andrey Sakharov, a historian from the USSR Academy of Sciences requested the podium and gave what he termed the historian's point of view. He generally supported what Rybakov said about the moral-psychological restructuring of Soviet society, but pointed out that "it is not the cult of personality that we are talking about here. A cult, per se, does not exist; we are talking about the historical regime of a dictatorship. Stalin's period was a period of an individual dictator and, as such, complex and not Russian-specific. Mankind has always attempted to make a god of someone, as history illustrates. Stalin knew this and exploited this need in

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people." The dangers of Stalinsim, as Sakharov sees it, is that he awakened in people "the stereotype of man's desire for power", reviving it and strengthening it. People don't want to part with the power of being able to push their subordinates into the ground. This is a sociological problem, claims Sakharov, and "what we, as historians, are presently dealing with."

10. On a final note and in response to the discussion centering around Stalin and the need for psychological restructuring, Rybakov emphatically [with fist hitting the podium] stressed that the country and the Soviet people cannot continue on the Stalinist path because the instinct for self-preservation of a nation is too strong, and no progress can be made otherwise. "The nation simply can't move forward without a psychological-moral restructuring," he reiterated.



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